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Helene Marie Kristensen  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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**A Revisionist Case Study of Women's Capability Approach:  
Critiquing the U.S. Afghanistan Intervention**

Helene Marie Kristensen

GS 445: Global Studies Capstone Seminar

Dr. Ajit Abraham

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the impact the United States has as a superpower country with its military intervention in Afghanistan, focusing on the actions taken and the impact it had on women and their status in Afghan society. This article aims to analyse the challenges women face in Afghanistan, ranging from the traditional gender norms to the suppression faced through the Taliban laws and the conflict through enforcement of Western values through intervention. Drawing on Martha Nussbaum's capability approach, the paper also analyses women's agency and well-being in Afghanistan in addition to considering critiques of the capability approach in a non-Western context. This paper also explores the complexities of Western intervention in Afghanistan and the challenges surrounding state-building efforts. It highlights the dire need for cultural sensitivity and the inclusion of local actors during the approach and phases of any reconstruction.

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the United States, as a global superpower, impacted Afghanistan's reconstruction through their military intervention, with a specific focus on women and their struggle for dignity and equality in Afghan society. The reason why Afghanistan was chosen was because of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan for the first time over twenty years ago; the U.S. had a mission to create peace and led an agenda of "war on terror". The "war on terror" was an agenda which the U.S. pushed following the al-Qaeda-led attack in New York on September 11, 2001. Osama Bin Laden was the current leader of al-Qaeda at the time of the attacks, yet he was also a part of training the Taliban.<sup>1</sup> The Taliban were quick to offer a deal with the U.S, where if the U.S ceased the bombing, in return, the Taliban would hand over Bin Laden.<sup>2</sup> President at the time, George W. Bush, rejected the deal, labelling it as a non-negotiable offer (The Guardian). Following this refusal, the U.S. led an invasion with the "war on terror" agenda, where the goal was to combat terrorism in the Middle East and "permanently incapacitate Bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders and their Taliban enablers" (Connah 2021). This timeline of events and the U.S. agenda is interesting because, at the time, the Taliban had not directly impacted the U.S. The U.S and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could have gotten away with only defeating al-Qaeda by bombing their encampment in the mountains of the neighbouring country, Pakistan, and then left the Taliban alone because they had not aided the organisation with anything other than providing some form of protection (Græsvik 2021, 263). Up until that point, the Taliban had shown no interest in expanding outside of their current territory of Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> PBS: Public Broadcastin Service, "-Who Is Bin Laden? -"

<sup>2</sup> Center for Preventative Action, "Instability in Afghanistan,"

Lines were blurred with the narrative given of the “war on terror” and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. These lines were further blurred by First Lady Laura Bush’s radio address, which was held in November, shortly after the 9/11 attack, where she gained critique for her lack of important distinctions. Researchers say she should have maintained a distinction between the Taliban and the terrorist groups. “There was a constant slippage between the Taliban and the terrorists so that they became almost one word—a kind of hyphenated monster identity: the Taliban-and-the-terrorist” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). Already here, there is a blurred line between what two separate agendas, or missions, are in Afghanistan. One is the continuing oppression of women through “malnutrition, poverty, and ill health” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). The second, as Abu-Lughod points out, is the Taliban-oriented oppression, which in reality is an exclusion from society by not being allowed to work, go to school, or even what seems almost trivial, like wearing nail polish (Abu-Lughod 2002). Laura Bush's speech has gained critique for creating a reinforcement of a significant divide between people who felt empathy for the women and children of Afghanistan and “the Taliban-and-the-terrorists, the cultural monsters who want to, as she put it, “impose their world on the rest of us”” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784).

Nevertheless, what is cause for concern is how, through the speech, women are asked to encourage or justify the American bombing, the military-led intervention, and the U.S. “War on Terror” agenda. In the words of Laura Bush, “because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment .... The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784).

This war on terror agenda and the subsequent start of the invasion forced the Taliban to relocate to the north, close to the capital, Kabul, then towards the south and eventually across the

border to Pakistan. From Pakistan, they were able to carry on “an insurgency against the Western-backed government in Kabul, Afghan national security forces, and international coalition troops” (Center for Preventative Action). Since the first U.S.-led invasion over twenty years ago, their mission was to create peace through the “war on terror” agenda; however, today, following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, what impact did the “war on terror” agenda have on Afghanistan and women? Is the country better than before the U.S. and Western involvement? The reign of the Taliban is not something that suddenly happened. They have had a presence in the country as Taliban dating back to the mid-1990s, but also prior to this under different names and organisations (Jurgensmeyer 2008). Despite this effort to combat terrorism and the narrative of ‘saving’ the people of Afghanistan, little to no lasting impact has been made if you compare Afghanistan today to what it was twenty or even thirty years ago. When looking at the military intervention the U.S. has conducted in the Middle East, with a focus on Afghanistan, one can ask the question of how the United States has served its superpower nation's capacity to impact the Afghan view of women in society?

## **Literature Review**

### Women in Afghanistan

Religion plays an essential role in the viewpoints and actions of women in Afghanistan. Through religion, “it appeared to them that religion had given men a monopoly over rights” (Kabeer, Khan, and Adlparvar 2011), which in turn made women's rights conditional, pending the approval of their husbands. However, little to no action had been taken in order to enforce any responsibilities to where the rights of males were upheld. Following the initial fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Afghan government attempted to both promote as well as create an

increase in human rights with a focus on women's rights through several legislative and institutional advances (Qazi Zada 2021). One such advancement is the establishment of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) as a national human rights institution through reforms and an active agenda to abolish violence against women (VAW), which is arguably caused by a weakness in the legal framework of women's rights in Afghanistan. The State legal code, customary practices and Islamic sharia law are all three incoherent sources of law that hold up Afghanistan's legal landscape (Qazi Zada 2021). A lack of harmony and unity among these three law entities has been a barrier to providing protection for women. The judicial system has not supported Afghan Women, who are caught between their constitutional rights and the constraints their religion and secular laws give them (Qazi Zada 2021).

Additionally, the United States and the international community should have retained some economic and political support, which should have been set aside for the defenders of women's rights in the country. This should have included the conditional of providing asylum visas should women become targets of violent retaliation, either by the Taliban, government-associated powerbrokers, or other male relatives (Allen and Wanda 2024). What is also a cause for concern is that in 2024, the Taliban and other important segments of Afghan society are starting to emerge as more "conservative, embracing doctrinaire versions of sharia that call for reducing women's rights and freedoms" (John and Felbab-Brown 2020) The Taliban's viewpoint today, compared to the views they held in the 90s, is marginally better. As a result, the West should have a greater concern about the topic than they were. The Taliban made the claim that if the West actually cared as much as they claimed to do about women, they should not have created any conditions for the humanitarian aid given. This narrative became the Taliban's scapegoat because it relieved the Taliban of the responsibility of prioritising as well as

maintaining their principles of women's rights (Wimpelmann 2022). What sets the Taliban apart from other rebel groups is that while their ideology has not changed, their impact only harms women domestically (Joshi and Olsson 2021).

Already in 2021, before the Taliban came to power, there was great concern amongst researchers and the international community about what could happen to women if the Taliban rose to power in the country, either alongside the Afghan government or by themselves. Fahim Yousufi points out a dark outlook, outlining a possible erosion of most, if not all, progress of women's rights dating back the past two decades (Yousufi 2021). From a social aspect, Yousufi argues that the Taliban “do not have the propensity and do not seem willing to compromise, to allow women to work or get an education...” (Yousufi 2021). In a regime with total Taliban control, women's ability and access to leadership roles and political participation will -and as we now see in 2024- be faced with barriers which will impair what women have been able to achieve in the past twenty years, and have now caused a delay any future growth (Yousufi 2021).

### The Moral Legitimacy of the U.S. and the Rebel Groups

Some experts argue that the War on Terror narrative led by the U.S. had an overall negative impact on the moral reputation of the West because of questionable tactics deployed during the initial phase of the military-focused intervention (Connah 2021). As a result, the U.S. ended up paying a high price for their efforts to permanently disable rebel group leaders like Bin Laden, other Al Qaeda leaders and other Taliban groups (Connah 2021). However, as a result of the longevity of the military operations in Afghanistan and its subsequent failure to achieve what was seen as the initial objectives, the result was a reduction of the “west's ‘appetite for military intervention’” (Connah 2021). Another factor that over time, the mission became more unclear

as a direct result of various reinterpretations and a political change in government in Washington, where during each change, there was a different emphasis on each aspect of the military intervention that was already happening (Sheikh 2022). This change in external intervention strategies supports the mandatory government, affecting the rebel opportunities to govern “and the dynamics of rebel legitimacy” (Terpstra 2020). As a result, Terpstra argues that this external intervention has created a contrasting effect on rebel governance and its specific forms of moral legitimacy.

### Western Intervention and Rebuilding

The U.S. is an entity that rebuilds a state or country, and several researchers and journalists have criticised their actions. Harpviken argues that, throughout the 1900s, Afghanistan was stable, with a set system of governance that benefited greatly from its legitimacy. The key element was a balance between the central government, which provided some core functions (such as security) but left a considerable amount of the governing to the traditional network. Much of the day-to-day exercise of power rested with authorities based on factors such as religion, tribe or geographical affiliation. The government in Kabul never sought to replace or otherwise transform the entrenched social structures central to most people's lives (Harpviken 2022).

During the rebuilding process in Afghanistan, several different political goals were set; however, arguably, the most dominant ones were regarding civil and military rebuilding. (Sheikh 2022). “According to the World Bank, about half of the Afghan legal economy was dependent on development aid when the Taliban rose to power and claimed the government in 2021” (Sheikh 2022). The U.S. has spent 145 billion since 2002 on rebuilding the security forces, the civil

government institutions, the economy, and the overall civil society (Sheikh 2022). Throughout this process, the creation of a joint security policy, its objectives, and the development policy efforts became a doctrine for how to proceed with the intervention in Afghanistan. Originally, this doctrine was meant to increase coordination and act more thoughtfully, strategically, and purposefully, but this joint thinking has continuously been criticised. Especially given the fact that much of the development projects physically in Afghanistan proved to be unsustainable and “in a policy brief, it’s described that it was the national security interest in relation to counterinsurgency and the war on terror, which acted as the driving force in the attempts to achieve greater coherence in their efforts” (Sheikh 2022). For the governments which donated their efforts, the primary purpose was using a visible civil society in the effort of winning the “hearts and minds” of the people, “and thus provide greater security by virtue of the population's support for the government” (Sheikh 2022).

### **Methodology**

The research question this paper is framed around is how the United States served its superpower nation’s capacity to impact the Afghan view of women in society? The data that has been collected is secondary data using a mixed-methodology approach. The data is mainly collected through the CSUMB library OneSearch tool and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), with the criteria being that the articles have to be peer-reviewed and published, and preferably published in 2020 or later, given the history of Afghanistan and the most recent resurgence of the Taliban. In order to collect my data, I used a selection of keywords set to reflect my initial research interest and early research question. These keywords pertained to the topics of the Taliban, Afghanistan, the Middle East, war, conflict, and peace. Through the guidance in my pre-capstone class, I narrowed down the focus area to the Taliban, Afghanistan,

conflict and women. Upon this new focus area, I continued making edits to my research question to make it more focused and less broad. This further helped me stay on track with my research and thus use more precise keywords in the CSUMB library database. The other platform I used to find sources was PRIO because they are known for their excellent research work and analysis of conflicts and events. Through their blog posts and sources, I was redirected to where the articles were published, which in turn gave me more keywords to find further information on the topic. My statistics were found following a one-on-one research meeting with a CSUMB librarian, who showed me the library's digital resources and websites like Country Watch, CIA World Factbook, and the Personal Freedom Index.

### **Theory**

In order to frame this topic, the theory of capability approach, as explained by Martha Nussbaum, a contemporary feminist scholar, will be utilised. Nussbaum's core of the capability approach is creating a baseline to measure a person's capability and function. (Robeyns and Byskov 2023). The function is described here as “doings and beings” (Robeyns and Byskov 2023), which can include different states of human beings, activities the individual has achieved, such as being well nourished, being married, having an education, and being able to travel. (Robeyns and Byskov 2023). Nussbaum distinguishes between two types or subcategories of capabilities approach. The first is basic capabilities. Basic capabilities are the skills humans are born with, which can be used immediately, such as seeing and hearing. These basic skills also create the foundation for developing more advanced capabilities and creating a ground for moral concern. (Nussbaum 2000, 84-5).

Secondly, internal capabilities are developed states of the individual, in which the person themselves are adequate or otherwise capable of exercising such functions. This differs from the basic capabilities because they can be viewed as mature conditions or otherwise in a state of readiness. This readiness can be bodily maturing, which happens without much external intervention; for example, children become capable of speaking their native language if they hear it enough during a certain critical period. (Nussbaum 2000, 84). However, Nussbaum argues that even though people can develop a sense of power through peer support, there is a barrier which prevents them from “functioning in accordance with it” (Nussbaum 2000, 84). This can be seen through the law, both the religious sharia laws and the weakness of the Afghan legal framework. The lack of unity in such laws has then acted as a barrier to creating protection for women. As a result, women are caught between constitutional rights and religious and secular laws, which both, in turn, impact their capability, as outlined by Nussbaum (Qazi Zada 2021). Furthermore, following the U.S. withdrawal from the country in August of 2021, is that in 2024, the Taliban and Afghan society overall is shifting and moving toward a more conservative society.<sup>3</sup> This increasingly conservative society favours the sharia laws and what is known as the doctrinaire versions of these laws, where they actively outline the reduction of both women's rights and freedom (Allen and Wanda 2024).

Therefore, Nussbaum argues there is a third set of capabilities that she titles combined capabilities. Combined capabilities can be defined the same way as internal capabilities; however, they are also combined with external conditions “for the exercise of the function” (Nussbaum 2000). Nussbaum makes the argument that a woman who was widowed as a child and, as a result, denied a second marriage has “the internal but not the combined capability for

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<sup>3</sup> Brader, “Timeline of Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan”

sexual expression...” (Nussbaum 2000, 85). As a result, individuals who are citizens of repressive nondemocratic regimes, like Afghanistan, “have the internal but not the combined capability to exercise thought and speech in accordance with their conscience” (Nussbaum 2000, 85). Nussbaum also notes the importance of political rights, such as what Amartya Sen writes: “Political rights are important not only for the fulfilment of needs, they are crucial also for the formulation of needs. And this idea relates, in the end, to the respect that we owe each other as fellow human beings” (Nussbaum 2000, 96).

Critiques of the capability approach include philosopher Leslie Stevenson, who makes the argument that the capabilities approach is not fair from the perspective of a just society because, in its current form, it does not encompass everyone and, therefore, is not inclusive (Stevenson 2018, 293). Some of the critiques Stevenson highlights are individuals' ability to participate, the comprehension and lack of nuance, the lack of cultural sensitivity, differences in power dynamics and structural injustice, and policy implementations.

### **Findings**

Through the research process, it became apparent that there were not many voices speaking up for the people in Afghanistan, especially the women, following the takeover of the Taliban. Additionally, with the U.S. being a superpower country and the power it entails, why was the U.S. not told to change its course? Two links became apparent while conducting data and through the research. The first was the way the U.S. conducted their warfare in the country, and the second was the diplomatic agenda and negotiations they conducted with both Afghanistan and, in recent years, the Taliban. According to CountryWatch, the personal freedom index gives countries a rank based on the average values given on a score of 0 to 100. Afghanistan ranked

second to last with a score of 2.25, beating only the Korean Democratic Republic, also known as North Korea (Country Watch, n.d.).

### Western Imposition in Afghanistan

The Chief of Defense in Norway, Erik Kristoffersen, argues that the West has had too significant a role in the war against the Taliban and, at the same time, imposed too much in the war. These actions resulted in the West becoming one of the two fighting entities with the Taliban (Græsvik and Zaman 2023). Kristoffersen further argues that by creating this divide of the West fighting against the Taliban, the result was that the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the people of Afghanistan never claimed any ownership of the war. Subsequently, as the West withdrew its forces as abruptly as they did, ANA was unable to handle the war by itself. Whenever the ANA was fighting alongside the Western soldiers, they were winning every time; however, when they had to fight by themselves, the Taliban quickly took control (Græsvik and Zaman 2023). Other researchers also share a consensus with what Kristoffersen argues, that from a historical point of view, Afghan society has always been viewed as weak. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that Afghanistan is a country that cannot be ruled and has always been in conflict (Harpviken 2022). This can be linked to what Nussbaum refers to as internal capabilities because the soldiers have the internal capabilities to fight against the Taliban. However, in reality, they had no real chain of command as a result of an almost constant restructuring in the Afghan army.<sup>4</sup>

Negotiations to end the war in Afghanistan have been going on for years, with varying degrees of success. A significant change in the war happened in February 2020 when the Taliban and the U.S. government signed a peace deal, which got the name the Doha Agreement (Center

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<sup>4</sup> Basit, "Why Did the Afghan Army Disintegrate so Quickly?"

for Preventative Action). The Doha agreement created a timeline for when the U.S. was set to withdraw their military troops from Afghanistan, with deadlines for a gradual reduction. The Taliban, on the other hand, promised they would enter into negotiations with the Afghan government and outlined a promise that their current territorial control would not end up in the hands of other terrorist organisations.<sup>5</sup> In addition, this document was significant because there was no official ceasefire agreement, which meant that the Taliban would be allowed to continue with their operations.

Shortly after the initial attack on the U.S. on 9/11, First Lady Bush held a radio address where she pointed out some of the challenges women were faced with in the current state of Afghanistan. First Lady Bush did offer some valid points about women being malnourished, living in poverty and a lack of access to healthcare in Afghanistan. The Afghan population is young, with most of the population between the ages of 15 and 64 (57.35%), closely followed by the ages of 0 and 14 (39.8%). Additionally, only a small part of the population is old, and according to The World Factbook, in 2023, only 2.85% of the Afghan population was estimated to be over 65 years old (CIA 2024). The median age for the population is also quite young for both genders. The median age for men is just 19.8, and women closely follow at 20 years old. Because of the current situation in the country, the latest statistics from 2015 show that women have their first child at a very young age, just under 20 years old, and the maternal mortality rate is 620 deaths per 100,000 live births (CIA 2024).

Only a small portion of the Afghan population can read and write. One-third aged 15 and up can read and write, at around 37.3%. As expected, this is disproportionate in favour of men, with just over half, 52.1%. As of 2021, only 22.6% of women were able to read and write. This

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<sup>5</sup> Center for Preventative Action, "Instability in Afghanistan,"

is a direct result of how much education they are able to get, with females only being allowed up to 8 years as of 2018 and males being allowed a few more years until 13 (CIA 2024).

### International Response

When looking at the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, the Iraqi State-Building project can be viewed as a parallel because Afghanistan was not the U.S.'s first rebuilding mission, both abroad and in the Middle East—in theory, having historical lessons learned from *the attempt* to rebuild the Iraqi state administration. Despite this, what should have been a historical lesson in conducting state-building projects did not form the basis of the invasion from the get-go in 2001. As the U.S. also spearheaded the rebuilding of Iraq, Paul Bremer was given the responsibility of rebuilding the Iraqi state administration during its early years. Bremer “had the responsibility of administering the occupation of the oil-rich country. Bremer was, in reality, the most powerful man in Iraq for over a year...” (Græsvik 2021, 107). As the author highlights, what is alarming about this situation is that Bremer did not speak Arabic, nor had he ever worked in an Arabic-cultured work environment before, nor in diplomacy. However, what is most concerning about this is that, according to Vice President Dick Cheney, it did not make Bremmer unfit for the job because Cheney had hand-picked him for the position (Græsvik 2021). “Americans are, despite their history, quite bad at successful nation-building. However, what is most concerning about this is their lack of self-awareness” (Græsvik 2021, 107).

### Critique of the Capability Approach

Both Nussbaum's and Sen's capability approaches have been critiqued. Liberals are critiquing it because of its focus on “the ability to achieve the kind of lives we have reason to value” (Wells, n.d.). Wells points out the problems with this because it imposes a set of external

values or sets an evaluation on what is considered a good life, regardless of what the individuals themselves may consider. “Rawls, for example, notes that the reason for liberals to focus on the fair allocation of general purpose resources rather than achievement is that this best respects each individual’s fundamental right to pursue their own conception of the good life.” (Wells, n.d.).

The reason why Rawls has this viewpoint is that he believes that justice is political, because “it is not the task of justice to assess people’s achievements, but rather to ensure the fairness of the conditions of participation in society” (Wells, n.d.). Justice should, therefore, act as a neutral third party in terms of determining individuals' concept of good. However, Wells argues that this conflicts with the capability approach because of its purpose of measuring people’s achievement.

Sen replied to this criticism and highlighted the variability in an individual’s ability to change their access to various resources into functions that work for the individuals. As pointed out by Rawls, theories of justice focus on the distribution of resources under the assumption that these resources will be distributed equally but also exclude relevant information about the correlation between individuals and their ability to utilise the resources.

### Revisionist Viewpoint of the Capability Approach

While the capability approach creates a framework for measuring a human’s capabilities, more nuance must be added. The current capacity of the capability approach does not necessarily capture all levels of an individual's capability. Philosopher Leslie Stevenson makes the argument that while Nussbaum’s list of capabilities does encompass traditional human capabilities, however, from the perspective of a just society, these capabilities do not encompass everyone and, therefore, are not inclusive (Stevenson 2018, 293). Stevenson further argues that Nussbaum's list of capabilities can be critiqued “as essentialist, as Western, as prejudiced against

various groups, and as androcentric” (Stevenson 2018, 294). In this context, essentialism is defined as “in the context of human feminism, essentialism refers to the idea that there is a property or properties common to all human beings” (Stevenson 2018, 305).

One such example which Stevenson highlights is the prejudice against certain groups because of their inability to, for example, participate. While one of the capabilities is playing and participating in recreational activities, a child who has a form of disability which hinders them from using a playground is, according to Nussbaum's theory, lacking an essential human capacity. However, in reality, while these individuals might not be able to play at the playground, they would still be able to take part in playing, but in a different way (Stevenson 2018). This means that the definition should not be clear-cut or set with strict measurements but should rather be more subjective and less susceptible to bias.

Secondly, critiques state that while the capabilities approach is comprehensive, it needs to catch the nuances of the individual, and their differences (Stevenson 2018). It mirrors, much the bias previously mentioned, that it does not adequately capture the nuances of the individual's human capabilities. The suggested revision is to expand on the notion of capabilities. Hence, they include both the social and relational aspects, which is suggested can be vital to participating in democratic processes and having the capacity to form and keep meaningful relationships (Robeyns and Byskov 2023).

Thirdly is cultural sensitivity, where critics argue that Nussbaum's theory favours Western values. The argument is that in its current form, to a certain extent, it disregards or otherwise does not adequately enough assess the diversity of cultural values or norms across various societies (Robeyns and Byskov 2023). Therefore, from a revisionist perspective, the

capabilities approach should incorporate a more diverse cultural perspective into its framework. Thus, make sure it is still applicable and, at the same time, relevant across a multitude of contexts and cultures, including Western and non-Western societies.

Fourth is the power dynamics and the structural injustices, which emphasise the injustices of the individual's capability. This is where the critique of androcentric plays a role because in some societies, like the one found in Afghanistan, the power dynamic between two individuals, or even between a couple, is in favour of the man. In the current Afghan society, women have little freedom of choice, first of all, because of the imposed set of rules by the Taliban, but also the expectation that “unless women are menstruating, or ill she had to please her husband when *he* wanted to” (Græsvik 2021, 241). It is injustices like this, which revisionists argue need to be addressed in the capabilities approach so that it takes more into consideration the power imbalance in society and the discrimination against women and has a more intersectional approach when considering how race, gender, class, and disabilities have an impact or otherwise influences an individual's capabilities (Robeyns and Byskov 2023).

The fifth and final point is policy implications. A critique is the implementation of policies, which in some ways ties back to the first point about inclusion, and it can ask the question, who should be in charge of these policies, and who should be included in drafting and implementing these policies, along with deciding who should address these social inequalities? (Robeyns and Byskov 2023); (Robeyns and Byskov 2023). While the capability approach does provide a valuable framework in terms of conceptualising well-being and justice, implementing it would require deliberate consideration of both socioeconomic and political factors. In addition, the integration with other theories and methodologies, where the end result should be both

tangible and sustainable, as well as have the potential to be long-lasting and create lasting improvement in people's lives.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has examined the complex dynamics of the United States military intervention in Afghanistan and its impact on Afghan society, with a focus on women's rights and their struggle for both equality and dignity. This has been examined through historical events, scholarly research, and the theoretical framework of Martha Nussbaum's capability approach, where several key points have emerged. The first was the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, under the "war on terror" narrative, following the 9/11 attacks, which acted as a pivotal moment in the U.S.'s trajectory both in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. Despite the initial intentions, where the focus was to create peace, save women and combat terrorism, the outcomes of the intervention have been mixed. The argument can be made that there has been little to no lasting impact on the stability of Afghanistan and the status of women in society. Secondly, the capability approach, as outlined by Nussbaum, framed the theoretical lens which assesses the context of women's capabilities, with direct parallels to Afghanistan and the Taliban-led regime, and their lack of freedom. Critiques of the capability approach, as well as revisionists, highlight a need for a far more nuanced understanding of the theory, which takes into account cultural diversity, power dynamics and structural injustices of any given country, but especially with a complex country like Afghanistan.

This paper has also attempted to highlight the importance of creating boundaries with Western intervention and nation-building efforts so that the people of Afghanistan get a sense of ownership of the situation and, following Western withdrawal, are able to maintain the efforts

and strategies implemented by the West. While the state rebuilding efforts in Iraq should have served as a historical precedent in Afghanistan, many of the same mistakes were still made. Moreover, it has also examined the evolving nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, from the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan to the somewhat failure of the Doha Agreement, which forced the U.S. out of Afghanistan while still allowing the Taliban to continue with their operations. There is an urgent need for an international response which prioritises human rights in Afghanistan, especially focusing on women's rights, which still takes into consideration the Afghan values and their way of living without forcing external Western values. In essence, the case of Afghanistan serves as a reminder of the complex landscape of our world today and how thin the line can be between successful military intervention, if such a thing exists, and good diplomacy. Moving forward, it is essential for government leaders, military leaders, policymakers and scholars to create and engage in nuanced dialogues which foster action which, in turn, respects the agency and the aspiration of the Afghan people, specifically women, while navigating the intricate geopolitical landscape of the region.

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